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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE      WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
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**HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON TRANSPORT,  
ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH**

Steering Committee on the Transport, Health and  
Environment Pan-European Programme

Fifth session  
Geneva, 16–17 April 2007  
Item 5 (a) (i) of the provisional agenda

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME**

**Progress reports and proposals for further action**

**Clearing House on Transport, Health and Environment<sup>1</sup>**

Note by the secretariat<sup>2</sup>

1. The Clearing House on the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) is a Web portal designed to facilitate exchange of information and

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<sup>1</sup> Previous reports of the secretariat on the development of the Clearing House are contained in the following documents available on THE PEP website [www.thepep.org/en/commitee/committee.htm](http://www.thepep.org/en/commitee/committee.htm):

THE PEP Clearing House background reports Nos.1–10 (available upon request)

ECE/AC.21/2003/2 – EUR/03/5040828/2

ECE/AC.21/2004/3 – EUR/04/5045236/3 and Add.1

ECE/AC.21/2005/3 – EUR/05/5046203/3 and Add.1

ECE/AC.21/2006/3 – EUR/06/THE PEPST/3

<sup>2</sup> This document has been submitted late due to technical reasons.

knowledge across the transport, environment and health sectors in the pan-European region. It is based on and in line with the priority areas and actions constituting the policy framework of THE PEP and its workplan as adopted by the second High-Level Meeting on Transport, Environment and Health (ECE/AC.21/2002/6 – EUR/02/5040828/6; ECE/AC.21/2002/9 – EUR/02/5040828/9). This note provides information on the work done by the Advisory Board and the secretariat during the pilot operation phase of the Clearing House, in line with decisions by the Steering Committee. In addition, it presents proposals for further development of the Clearing House for consideration by the Steering Committee.

2. The Clearing House is used to collect, disseminate and exchange information on sustainable transport policies, legislation, research and good practices, with a particular focus on the 12 countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA)<sup>3</sup> and South-Eastern Europe (SEE).<sup>4</sup> Its present information content covers 110 topics relevant to the transport, environment and health sectors, including as priorities the health and environmental effects of transport, policy integration, urban transport and transport demand management. These priority areas were identified by UNECE and WHO/Europe member States as being of central importance for the promotion and implementation of sustainable transport in the pan-European region.

3. The Clearing House is primarily targeted at addressing the information needs of national and local policy makers as well as transport planners and experts in the design, communication and implementation of sustainable transport policies. It has a practical organization and an intuitive method to access the available information by using a dedicated search engine and an information tree that allows for intuitive search by topic areas.

4. The information collected, validated, structured and disseminated by the Clearing House mainly stems from national THE PEP focal points and other information providers in UNECE and WHO/Europe Member States and are, to a large extent, kept and maintained by the original information providers. Information providers need to be registered by the Clearing House and include at present more than 250 experts from Governmental, intergovernmental, regional and local authorities, non-governmental organizations and scientific and research institutions.

5. The Clearing House has been developed by the secretariat in three phases:

- (a) Development of the conceptual design (April 2003 – March 2004)
- (b) Implementation phase (April–December 2004)
- (c) Pilot operation phase (January 2005 – December 2006)

6. The Clearing House was officially launched on 6 December 2005 and operates in English and Russian. The framework of the Clearing House and the description of topic areas are also available in French. The Clearing House is accessible at [www.thepep.org/CHWebSite](http://www.thepep.org/CHWebSite).

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<sup>3</sup> EECCA: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

<sup>4</sup> SEE: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

## **I. ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS OF THE CLEARING HOUSE PILOT OPERATION**

### **A. Pilot operation: January–December 2005**

7. The activities to be undertaken during the first phase of the pilot operation had been agreed by the Steering Committee at its third session (11–12 April 2005).<sup>5</sup> In March 2005, access to the Clearing House portal, including the credentials that allow authorized uploading of information, was given to all THE PEP focal points. Following a survey among users to obtain feedback on all operational aspects of the Clearing House and the holding of a special meeting with interested users on 13 April 2005, the secretariat has made various modifications to the Clearing House site, its underlying mechanisms and has developed new features. In particular, parts of the Clearing House website have been redesigned to improve user friendliness and a directory of websites of national ministries dealing with environmental, transport and health was incorporated. Key messages providing succinct information on each of the topic areas available in the Clearing House database have been developed.

8. Furthermore, a special registration form was developed that allows registration of other users than THE PEP focal points. The secretariat oversees the processing and validation of such registration requests and, in case of doubts, transmits these applications to the Clearing House Advisory Board for guidance.

9. The secretariat has also developed two comprehensive user guides to assist in the use of some of the more complex automated Clearing House features: (a) User Guide: Submit a Document; and (b) User Guide: My Clearing House. Additional user guides could be prepared should new features of the Clearing House (such a forum) be added. In addition, the secretariat provides support to users by e-mail upon request.

### **B. Pilot operation: January–December 2006**

10. Taking account of the decisions made and guidance provided by the Steering Committee at its fourth session (10–11 April 2006), the secretariat has continued its work under the pilot operation phase through 2006 and has further fine-tuned and improved the technical features of the Clearing House.<sup>6</sup>

11. Due to financial constraints, the Clearing House operated in 2006 in “automatic” mode, i.e. without a content manager as foreseen originally who would have ensured the necessary interaction with users and information providers and would have accompanied the uploading and classification of data and information. The secretariat was only able to supervise the automatic operations of the Clearing House and ensured the required validation (verification and authorization) of uploaded data and information on a regular basis (usually once a week). It also uploaded, to the extent possible, information submitted by mail or e-mail.

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<sup>5</sup> ECE/AC.21/2005/13 – EUR/05/5046206/13, paragraphs 12–15.

<sup>6</sup> ECE/AC.21/2006/10 – EUR/06/THEPEPST/10, paragraphs 11–14.

12. On the information technology (IT) side, major work was undertaken in 2006 to migrate the Clearing House database to a new server that provides more stable and faster operations. Taking account of user feedback, the response and operation of the Clearing House search engine has been improved and the automatic messaging system for information providers has been streamlined. In addition, regular IT maintenance work and fine-tuning of the features of the Clearing House has continued, focusing on improvements in the Clearing House directories and data bases and in the restoration of “broken” links using an automatic mechanism.

13. Furthermore, a concept for an interactive bulletin board has been prepared that does not only enshrine a simple feedback mechanism for users on technical questions relating to the operation of the Clearing House, but could also develop into an interactive electronic forum. Such a bulletin board or forum would allow users (registered or not) to pose queries related to the topics covered and information provided by the Clearing House. The Clearing House manager(s) could then either answer directly or identify experts that are able to provide answers in case of complex enquiries. This may entail circulating questions or information of general interest to all THE PEP focal points or to specific persons. Questions and answers could then be published on the website in a dedicated area accessible to all users. Substantive work on the development of such an interactive tool and in particular its application requires, however, the permanent availability of a Clearing House manager.

14. Detailed information on the financial resources received and utilized during the pilot operation phase of the Clearing House in 2006 are contained in document ECE/AC.21/SC/2007/9 – EUR/07/5068055/9.

## **II. OPERATION OF THE CLEARING HOUSE IN 2006**

### **A. Information providers and documents available in the Clearing House**

15. The number of persons authorized to upload information onto the Clearing House at the end of 2006 was 255, including 32 from EECCA and 35 from SEE countries.

16. The number of uploaded documents or references (including Web links) available at the Clearing House amounts to around 550 and around 1,500 resources are indexed in the search engine (the Clearing House search engine also scrolls regularly the EST goes EAST Clearing House). The majority of these documents and references are uploaded by NGOs and by the WHO/Europe and UNECE secretariats. The latter is also due to the fact that the secretariats often receive relevant information by e-mail or by other means. The uploading of such documents is then attributed to the secretariats involved. Hardly any information is provided by EECCA and SEE countries.

17. Close to 70 per cent of these documents or references are in English, around 25 per cent are in French and fewer than 5 per cent are in Russian. The main substantive areas addressed by these documents and references are in the order of importance: “Urban transport”, “effects of transport” and “demand management”. Only relatively little information is available on “cross-cutting issues”. Within these areas, the most comprehensive information coverage is given in the

fields of “pollution and noise”, “public transport” and “modal split”. Most of the documents and references relate to international sources. Still very little information is available on national studies, research or governmental records that is of particular interest for EECCA and SEE countries. THE PEP focal points have an important role to play in order to overcome this lack of information.

## **B. Use and users of the Clearing House**

18. While statistical figures on the number of unique visitors of the Clearing House or on page views of Clearing House sites, calculated by Internet counters, have to be regarded with a certain degree of caution, they may nevertheless give a certain indication about the use made of the Clearing House.

19. In 2006, the average number of visitors of the Clearing House was in the order of 340 per month, climbing from around 300 in the beginning of the year to around 500 at the end of 2006. The number of pages visited during the same period was on the order of 1,000 per month with peaks during the beginning and the end of the year. Most country visitors came from the countries in Western Europe and the United States, but relatively large numbers were also recorded from the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The peaks in the number of visitors seem to coincide with the capacity building workshops organized as part of THE PEP’s activities.<sup>7</sup> This shows the importance of the Clearing House as a complementary source of information as well as a platform for disseminating the outcomes of project activities, including those undertaken in the framework of THE PEP.

20. More detailed and up-to-date statistics on the operation of the Clearing House in 2006 and in early 2007 will be available at the session.

## **III. SUSTAINED OPERATION OF THE CLEARING HOUSE IN 2007 AND BEYOND**

21. During the pilot operation phase in 2006, most of the work for the Clearing House has been undertaken by part-time IT experts that were supported by regular UNECE staff on an ad hoc basis. They were responsible for the maintenance and fine-tuning of the technical features of the Clearing House and its database as described above. Resources to engage a Clearing House content manager were not available to the secretariat.

22. The Clearing House Web portal is expected to have a central role in disseminating information on all THE PEP activities, such as the workshops to build capacity and to exchange good practise to provide a forum for the exchange of experience and to provide access to tools developed under THE PEP framework (e.g. the Toolbox for Action on Transport, Health and Environment). Therefore, the contribution and feedback of THE PEP national focal points is of utmost importance. In addition, their active involvement is of particular importance for the provision and uploading of information and relevant data and documents on national experiences – positive and negative – in the fields covered by THE PEP and its Clearing House.

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<sup>7</sup> Workshop on Institutional Mechanisms for Policy Integration, Berlin, 23–24 January 2006, and Workshop on Sustainable Urban Transport and Land-Use Planning, Tbilisi, 18–20 October 2006.

23. With the official launch of the Clearing House on 6 December 2005, the design, the technical development and the implementation of the main features of the Clearing House has been completed successfully. During 2006 the technical features of the Clearing House were further improved and made user-friendly. The challenge is now to enlist the necessary resources to guarantee its continued operation in 2007 and beyond and to advertise the facilities and services of the Clearing House to policy makers in WHO/Europe and UNECE Member States. If this can be achieved, then the Clearing House could become a powerful tool to support efforts to promote sustainable transport in the pan-European region and to integrate environmental and health concerns into transport policies, particularly in EECCA and SEE countries.

24. To make this happen, further efforts are needed in the following areas:

**A. Visibility**

25. The Clearing House must be able to reach its target users, particularly in EECCA and SEE countries. Apart from THE PEP secretariat, THE PEP national focal points as well as delegations at WHO/Europe and UNECE conferences and expert groups in transport, health and environment play a key role in this undertaking in establishing links to the Clearing House from relevant national websites and in disseminating information on the Clearing House at relevant national and international events.

**B. Comprehensive and up-to-date information**

26. A Web portal such as the Clearing House will be used regularly only if it can provide value-added services compared to other traditional information and service providers. Again, THE PEP focal points play a crucial role in this respect, as they are the main information and data providers for the Clearing House. They are also well placed to provide the well-targeted and high-quality information, including best practices that could make a difference. The simple and automatic information uploading mechanisms of the Clearing House should facilitate their task. Further expansion of the Russian language facilities in the Clearing House could contribute to increasing the value added of the Clearing House for EECCA and SEE countries.

**C. Additional services**

27. The currently available basic features of the Clearing House could be complemented by additional services, if required and if appropriate resources are available not only for their development, but also for their continued operation. Based on comments and user surveys, a number of such additional services have already been identified, such as electronic forums, additional databases and statistics, translation services, capacity-building and training programmes and information about sources of funding.

#### **D. Continued operation**

28. The 2006 pilot operation of the Clearing House has shown that operating a practically fully automatic Clearing House is technically viable. The pilot operation has however also shown that a permanent exchange of information with and the upload of documents onto the Clearing House from more than 50 countries, but particularly from the EECCA and SEE countries requires more than a well-functioning machine. It requires active involvement of THE PEP focal points and other national information providers. It requires personnel that inform them about newly arising issues and activities in the field and remind them about their undertaking to collect and provide information at the national level for the benefit of other countries through THE PEP Clearing House. Thus the provision of a Clearing House content manager on a permanent basis remains one of the key priorities and challenges still to be tackled.

29. In spite of its highly automated features, the Clearing House also requires a minimum of technical supervision and maintenance. Any disruption, even temporary, of such services could bring its operation to a standstill and might jeopardize its role, as dissatisfied users will not be easily convinced to come back.

30. The Steering Committee, at its third and fourth sessions, has already underlined the importance of providing adequate resources for the sustained and long-term operation of the Clearing House, including voluntary donations, sharing of costs among all member countries, resources made available through regular or similar budgets of UNECE and WHO/Europe, or a combination thereof.

31. As is indicated in document ECE/AC.21/2006/10 on resources for the implementation of THE PEP work programme, the resources presently available would not even allow the continuation of the pilot operation of THE PEP Clearing House during 2007 in “automatic” mode. For the sustained operation of the Clearing House annual resources in the order of US\$ 168,000–US\$ 240,000 are required unless adequate regular or similar internal resources can be tapped.<sup>8</sup>

32. Given the present uncertainties about available resources for the sustained operation of the basic features of the Clearing House and about the amount of additional services it could provide, it is advisable to extend the pilot operation phase of the Clearing House and to use the remaining extrabudgetary resources earmarked for that purpose. This would also allow further fine-tuning of the technical features of the Clearing House operating, since December 2005, under “real world conditions” and the installation and testing of some additional services.

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<sup>8</sup> In early 2005, the secretariat estimated the annual cost for personnel for the operation of the Clearing House, if administered by the UNECE, to be on the order of US\$ 168,000 to US\$ 240,000, depending on the qualifications and experience of recruited staff. These estimates were based on cost figures for two professional staff (ECE/AC.21/2005/10 – EUR/05/5046203/10).

#### IV. ACNOWLEDGMENTS

33. The timely development of THE PEP Clearing House its successful launch in December 2005 and the pilot operation in 2006 would not have been possible without the generous financial and in-kind support made available to the secretariat by Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

#### V. GUIDANCE BY THE STEERING COMMITTEE

34. The Bureau, at its fifth meeting (Rome, 15 December 2006), noted that it is a challenge to ensure that the Clearing House remains a “living tool” that provides value added to the daily work of its users and is constantly updated by them, particularly by THE PEP focal points. This requires human resources and the securing of adequate funding for a full-fledged operation of the Clearing House. Given the present uncertainties about available resources for the sustained operation of the Clearing House, the Bureau felt that its pilot operation should be prolonged during 2007. The Bureau also underlined that a dedicated content manager was needed to ensure a constant flow of communication and to increase interest of users. Until resources for this are secured, the development of additional services, such as a bulletin board or a newsletter, should be postponed (ECE/AC.21/SC/2007/2 – EUR/07/5068055/2).

35. In particular, the Steering Committee may wish to provide guidance on the following issues:

*Visibility:* How can the visibility and use of the Clearing House, particularly in EECCA and SEE countries, be further improved? At its meeting in December 2006, the Bureau invited the secretariat to “relaunch” the Clearing House, for example by means of e-mail notifications and a leaflet, to promote its visibility.

*Information upload:* How to increase the number and relevance of information uploads, particularly by countries, but also by intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations?

*Clearing House features:* What and where are the strength and weakness of the present features of the Clearing House? How could they be further developed? To what extent, if any, should additional services be developed to complement the present features of the Clearing House?

*Operation:* How can the sustained operation of the Clearing House in 2007 and beyond be ensured? Attention should be given to the fact that possibly neither UNECE nor WHO/Europe will be in a position to ensure the continued operation of the Clearing House unless the necessary resources can be allocated for this purpose within existing regular or similar budgets and/or through additional extrabudgetary resources.

36. Finally, following approval of the conceptual design, development, implementation and the pilot operation of the Clearing House at its previous sessions, the Steering Committee may wish to endorse the work carried out by the secretariat in 2006.